

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning January 18th, 1863

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 5 Number 213

“I am the way.” John 14:6

THE importance of a way depends upon the end, or ends, which are to be reached or answered. In this case there is a twofold end by this way to be answered, and those ends are both of infinite and of everlasting importance. The one end is to escape the wrath to come: to this the dear Savior answers. “It is Jesus,” says the apostle, “who has delivered us from the wrath to come.” The other end is to gain possession both of the mansions spoken of in a preceding verse; to gain possession of that rest that remains for the people of God; to gain possession of that state of things where, in the highest sense of the word, it may indeed be said, “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage.” And when our text is looked at in this light, and when we consider the nature of this way by which these great ends are reached, our text, though the words are few, contains good tidings. Oh, what can be so delightful as this wondrous way of escaping the wrath to come, this wondrous way of possessing an inheritance with all them that are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus? For the way is as adapted unto us as the end is important. And I therefore enter, this morning, upon this beautiful text with a very great deal of pleasure, because it is a text that brings before us at once the dear Savior in such a form, and it is a text that suggests such a great variety of things, that, look which way we may at this text, if we look at it scripturally, there is everything to encourage the poor seeking, sinner, everything expressive of the love, the wisdom, the mercy, and the grace of God. And yet, in one sermon upon such a text as this (and, of course, I purpose giving no more than one sermon at present upon such a text as this) we can give only a sample of the respects in which Christ is the way. And as we are all satisfied with the end, we know that to be important; and as to heaven itself, the blessedness of that is altogether beyond description; and we know at present of that world only in part; I shall, therefore, this morning, not attempt to say anything upon the blessedness of the end, because the great concern with us is, do we know the way to that end? and are we savingly in the way? If we are brought into the way, then our great concern is to continue in the way. Once prove that we are brought into the way, the end then is certain. And the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart is connected with all the relations suggested in our text; but, for the sake of conciseness and clearness, I will take only a fourfold view of this way, connecting as I go along the work of the Holy Spirit with each characteristic of this way of escape from the wrath to come; this way to everlasting honor, glory, exaltation, and blessedness.

First, then, that it is *a righteous way*; second, that it is *a plain way*; third, that it is *a living way*; and fourth, that it is *a sure way*.

First, then, that it is *a righteous way*. The very word *righteous*, or the word *righteousness*, in relation to God, and in relation to the judgment to come, is more or less a terror to all men. Hence, when the apostle reasoned with Felix upon this subject of righteousness, embodying the various branches of that righteousness, he trembled, and said, "Go your way; I will send for you at a more convenient season." So that all men, more or less, tremble at the idea. They have an impression that God is righteous, and he is, too; and that God is just, and that impression is right; and that the unrighteous cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Now, then, let us see how the dear Savior sets all this matter to rights; that he is a righteous way by his going obediently to the end of God's holy law, and by his going in his passive obedience to the end of sin. He remained on the cross, and, I had almost said, would have remained to this day rather than have come down from the cross before sin was finished, before the victory was completed, before mercy and truth had met together. But the dear Savior knew when he had suffered all our hell; he knew when he reached the end of the curse; he knew when he had reached the end of sin and the end of death; he knew when he had by his death constituted the people of God all that justice, all that law, all that holiness, or all that love, for love desires its objects to be beautiful, all that love itself could require; that he had thus constituted his people as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and shall ultimately be to their foes terrible as an army with banners. Now, then, here is a poor sinner seeking after mercy; he knows not as yet in which way that mercy is to come, and he hears a voice saying, "Come unto me;" he hears a voice saying, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out;" he hears a voice saying, Be it known unto you, it is something not to be concealed, but something to be revealed, "that here judgment is given in your favor," "through this man," the man Christ Jesus, "is preached unto you that first essential which you need, namely, the forgiveness of sins; and that through this man is preached unto you the delightful truth that he that believes, let him be what he may, or let him have been what he may, rather, he that believes in him is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses." Here, then, when thus brought to see what Jesus Christ has done, and to delight in what he has done, and to take your stand here in a way of hope, and to say to yourself, Well, if ever I should get to heaven, I can see it must be by what Jesus Christ has done; there I venture, in that way, to hope in God; there I venture, in that way, to look for mercy; there I venture, in that way, to look for the loving kindness of the blessed God; if you are brought thus far, then you are brought rightly, for he is the way of justification. Hence, that delightful scripture, that I think I have lately noticed, but it has been this week very precious to my soul; it never struck me, with such force before, though I have seen great beauty in it; but it seemed to strike my mind, while meditating upon these things, with great force, namely, "It is God that justifies." Not only the declaration that God justified, but the present tense; there it stands in the running tense; and it is an eternal tense, it runs on to all eternity; to all eternity there will stand the testimony, "It is God that justifies." And if we ask the question, How? my text brings the answer. Says Christ, "I am the way;" for he is the way of righteousness. So that here it is the Lord justifies us from all he disapproves of, while he justifies us in what he approves. Here, then, judgment is given in our favor. "It is God that justifies because here, by Christ Jesus, sin is atoned for, as the poet nicely sings,

"Justice has no loss sustained."

All in one grand cause unite, and all is harmony here. Here it was that David, being brought to see this great High Priest as the way of justification, and sanctification, and mercy, and everything that he needed; being brought to see how God was just, and yet the Justifier; David was brought to this, and he contemplated this way. He saw how Jesus Christ would magnify the law, and make it honorable; he saw here how grace reigned; he saw here how mercy rejoiced against judgment; he saw here the freeness and the firmness of the promise; he saw here that wherever sin might abound, grace shall much more abound. And while contemplating this way of escape from the wrath to come, while contemplating this way of access to God, the Lord was pleased to bring home the word with such power into David's soul, that he was so full of love, and peace, and joy, and gratitude to God, that he could not help saying, "Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name. Who forgives," there it is, in this righteous way, Christ Jesus; not by any works of the creature; for, alas! if they were any part of the way, it would sink every thoroughly convinced sinner into eternal despair. No; it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, or might do, or could do, or ever should do, but it is owing to his mercy. Here pardoning mercy rolled in, and David sees the universality, and eternity and entirety of this forgiveness, "who forgives *all* your iniquities." What is it that makes us afraid of God? Sin. But if sin, all sin, past, present, and to come, heart, and lip, and life; all be forgiven, then there is nothing to fear. "And heals all your disease." What is it that has wounded our souls in all their parts? What is it that has vitiated our affections? What is it that has darkened our understandings? What is it that has perverted the will? What is it that has hardened the heart? What is it that has constituted us enmity itself against God? It is sin. These are the diseases; and the man that is born of God, he groans under these diseases; he longs for pure affection to God; he longs for a clear understanding of the way of God; he longs for softness of heart, expansion of soul; he longs for submission of will. Lord, give me grace to acquiesce in your will. He longs for reigning grace. And here, in this way, David found it. "Who heals all your diseases; and who redeems," here he finds in this way, also, a price that redeems him from destruction, "who redeems your life, from destruction." And then, in the same way, he finds sustenance: "who satisfies your mouth." I like that, because it is just my own experience; I am as satisfied with Jesus Christ, I make no hesitation in saying it, as I shall be when I am in heaven. I am as satisfied with this way in which God has come to man, and man is brought to God, as I shall be when I am in heaven. And I rejoice that this way is everlasting. And hence the Savior's mediatorial work being everlasting, is the great secret of the eternal tense of the words, "It is God that justifies." Those words could not continue to eternity were it not that Christ's righteousness is everlasting; and so, Christ's righteousness stands eternal. Being eternal in itself, it therefore stands as the way in which that declaration shall retain its present tense to endless duration. "It is God that justifies." Here, then, is righteousness, and here is forgiveness, and here is health, and here is redemption; and, says David, "who satisfies your mouth with good things." Oh, we are satisfied with the nature of the sustenance, and we are satisfied with the extent of the sustenance, and we are satisfied with the duration of the sustenance. We are not yet satisfied as to the realization, the amount of realization we have here; but, said one, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness." "And crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies, so that your youth is renewed, like the eagle's." Here, then, judgment is given in our favor. Now if Christ be the way of righteousness, we, to be in this way, must be in the way righteously; and God, the heart-searching God, knows whether we are in the way righteously or not; whether we hold the truth in righteousness, or whether we hold it in unrighteousness. If we hold the truth in mere profession, and not as a matter of necessity, and of understanding, and of vital experience, and of real heart

and soul, fast as in the sight of God, decision for it, if we do not hold it in this way, then we are not brought righteously into the way; so that your profession depends entirely upon your own experience of it, and not upon what others say about it. No, not upon what the minister may say about it; but that your religion depends entirely upon your own soul's experience. You know that you are a sinner, needing forgiveness, and that that forgiveness can come righteously to you only by the blood of Christ. You know that you are a poor wounded creature, wounded unto death in the body, and wounded in the soul, and that healing can come only by the blood of Christ; and you know that you are a poor destroyed sinner. "You have destroyed yourself and that redemption from that destruction can come only by the blood of Christ; and you know that you are a poor degraded creature, and that you can be exalted and crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercy only by the blood of Christ; that is to say, his precious atonement is the way in which the Lord does these things. And that you know also that you have grown old in and of yourself; that in the first Adam, the old Adam, everything wears out and comes to nothing; and that you can have eternal youth only by the atonement and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, my hearer, if this be the case, we shall bless God for this righteous way. Here is a way, then, in which all the perfections of God are honored; here is a way in which we have nothing to be afraid of in God. Afraid of our God, in a slavish sense? Oh, no! We should not be afraid of him in prayer, in the slavish sense; for when we pray, we should say, "Our Father." And we should not be afraid of Jesus Christ, in the slavish sense of the word. Reverence his blessed name! God grant us grace deeper and deeper to reverence his holy name; but not slavishly to fear, because when we know him so well love will so abound as to cast out fear; and so far from fear, our language will be, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Nor should we fear slavishly the Holy Spirit, but sing, as you sometimes very properly do,

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all your quickening powers."

That is what I like. Here, then, in this way our God appears with all the familiarity of our good Father. Here Jesus Christ appears in all the familiarity of divine, pure, supreme, infinite, and eternal endearment. Here the Holy Spirit appears in his testimony in all his endearment. You have done with Sinai; you have done with the broken covenant; you have done with threatening's; you may look over the threatening's of the Bible, and learn from them where, without Christ, you would have been; and learn from them the fearful portion of them that live and die without Christ; but you have nothing to do with those threatening's but deriving instruction from them to make you prize more and more that way of mercy which the Lord Jesus Christ is. He is the way, then, in which God (for that is the sum of all I am saying) the way in which God justifies us from all things; justified by his righteousness; and as the apostle in the 5th of the Romans says, "Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

Here, then, is the way. And how suited this is! Have you any confidence, then, in the atonement of Christ to bring you pardon? Have you that confidence in the atonement of Christ as to believe that it can heal your diseases, so that you can say with one, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean?" And have you confidence in the atonement of Christ, that it can redeem you from destruction; that it can crown you with loving-kindness and tender mercies; that it can satisfy your mouth with good things; that it can renew your youth like the eagle's? Can you say so? And can you say this is what you are come this morning to seek? You want to see God; and "blessed are

the pure in heart; they shall see God.” And so, it is God in Christ reconciling us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us, but imputing them unto One that was able and willing to bear them, and to put them away by the sacrifice of himself. Thus, then, Jesus, by taking the curse, made a curse, and suffering the curse, being made sin, going to the end of sin, enduring the whole, and honoring God in every way; here it is that Jesus is the righteous way. And if we are brought to renounce all confidence in the flesh and I am sure we shall, if we know by divine teaching what the flesh is. Saul of Tarsus never knew what the flesh was till God became his teacher. When God was his teacher, the law entered into his fleshly religion, and his fleshly religion became dead. He was on good terms with himself, and therefore on bad terms with the Lord and his people. But now that the law came, and he discovered all manner of concupiscence in his own heart, that he had nothing but sin, and filth, and wretchedness throughout, now he became on bad terms with himself; now he fell out with himself; now he disagreed with himself; now he loathed himself; now he renounced himself; now he rejected himself; and favored by the teaching of the Lord to take his stand in this heavenly way. If, therefore, we know by divine teaching what the flesh is, we shall renounce all confidence in the flesh, and shall do as our predecessors have done. We are Gentiles, and the Jews of old, that had the letter of the word, attained not unto the law of righteousness, because they sought it not in this way; but the Gentiles who were taught of God, like Cornelius and thousands of others, they were taught as Saul of Tarsus was, what they were in the flesh, and they saw nothing but wretchedness there, each exclaiming, “Oh, wretched man that I am!” and were brought to receive Jesus Christ, and to believe in him, and so they attained unto righteousness, were accepted of God, and are now before his throne without fault, without wrinkle, or any such thing; shall hunger no more, and shall thirst no more, nor any heat come upon them; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. All I want, then, of you is a knowledge of your need of this way of righteousness, and a firm confidence in it. Never give up prayer (must have a word of exhortation now and then), never give up seeking, never give up the Bible, never give up the house of God, never give up the ways of God; never do that. Never despair until you can prove from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is not able to save you; and when you have proved that, then give it all up in despair. Oh, but, say you, but then, perhaps, he may not be willing. Are you willing to be saved in his way? If so, he will save you. “You shall make your people willing in the day of your power.” Jesus Christ, as I have often said, came into the world, not to do what he could do, but to do God’s will. He would have gathered the Jews together as a hen gathers her chickens together under her wings, and they would not, and he was not commissioned to make them; and as he was not commissioned to make them willing, he did not make them willing. But he was commissioned to make his own people willing; he was commissioned to make the new covenant people willing. “You shall make your people willing in the day of your power.” “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.” I hope they will come; I trust they will come; I will send my servants and ask them to come. Not a word about it. Oh, no, no. “Them also I *must* bring;” not only *will*, but I *must*; if I keep good my covenant engagements, and if I do the will of my Father, I *must* bring them. So, then, my hearer, if you are brought out of every other way, and are thus willing, then you are, shall I say, an heir of the new covenant; you are born of God; you are an heir of God, you are a joint heir with Christ. And though your faith of assurance may be low enough, for you may have thick and impenetrable clouds over your mind of doubts and fears, yet, as the old divines were wont to say, if you have the faith of adherence, that’s it, that’s it, however little your faith is; but I must insist upon it that it must not be so small a faith as not to be the faith of adherence. No; if you have not the faith of adherence, I can give you no encouragement whatever.

But however short you are of the faith of assurance, if you have but the faith of adherence, You that did cleave,” there it is; “You that did cleave unto the Lord your God,” saith Moses, “are alive, every one of you.” So, then, poor little tried one, if you should die, you will be the first. “You are alive, every one of you,” not all that had the faith of assurance, but “you that did cleave unto the Lord your God.” I have felt sometimes a very strong sympathy with those words which you sing, and which I am persuaded you sing sometimes with a good deal of melody, too, namely,

“And still my soul would cleave to you,
Though prostrate in the dust.”

I have often felt deeply my soul, to sympathize with those words. Here is a cleaving; here is the faith of adherence. “I am the way,” in which you shall be righteous before God, sin forgiven and sin forgotten, sin atoned for, sin put away, righteousness brought in, and you brought in by that righteousness into the presence of God, there to dwell forever. I am rather rambling here; perhaps; but still I could not handle this part of the subject, nor do I intend to handle any part of our subject this morning in the mere doctrinal sense. My object has been to show that Jesus Christ is the way, the righteous way, the way in which God justly justifies, while at the same time, in harmony with that justice and justification, and it is by indeed that justification that all the mercy we have dwelt upon this morning comes in, and that if we have a knowledge of our need of this way, and the faith of adherence to it; some of you have the faith of assurance, bless the Lord for it! so that you have not only the faith of adherence, but the faith of assurance as well; you are doubly blessed, and others will be blessed the same by-and-bye. Now to have the faith of assurance without the faith of adherence is nothing but daring presumption; that is Antinomianism with a vengeance, to have the faith of assurance without the faith of adherence. Ah! I belong to the Lord; I don’t care about his ministers, and about his house, and about his ways; I am just as much at home on the ale-bench as anywhere else. Well, that is the faith of devils; it is the assurance of presumption, the assurance of daring blasphemy before God; that’s the kind of faith yours is; yours is not the faith that purifies the heart, much less overcomes the world; yours is not the faith that honors the Savior; yours is not the faith that enables you, to say honestly, “I have loved the habitation of your bouse; gather not my soul with sinners.” Why, yon gather yourself with them; you confess that you are at home with them; yon have such faith you can be at home anywhere. “Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with men of blood; for I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells.” Let us have, then, the faith of adherence; I feel ten times more concerned for that than the faith of assurance. The faith of adherence is perfectly safe; the faith of assurance is comfortable, but not safer.

But I must step into the next part. This way is not only a righteous way, but it is also *a plain way*. “There shall be an highway;” very conspicuous; an highway is more conspicuous than a byway; though some people like byways better than they do highways; “an highway, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over int;” no unregenerate man can enter, beyond the mere profession of it, into this way; “but it shall be for those, the wayfaring men;” as the Act of Parliament says, bona fide travelers; those that are really set out from the city of destruction, those that are really seeking mercy, those that are really seeking grace, those that are really seeking God, those who are solemnly concerned to go from strength to strength; till in Zion they shall appear before God. “The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein;” it shall be so plain. So, it is to us. There is not anything that I know of plainer. That Jesus Christ has

finished transgression, and made an end of sin, plain as A, B, C. That Jesus Christ's atonement is everlasting in its power and perfection, plain as A, B, C. That his righteousness is everlasting, that God's love is everlasting, that his covenant is everlasting, "the wayfaring men shall not err therein;" no, the way is as plain as can be. Every truth essential to our salvation as plain as A, B, C. God's love is in Christ; God's election of us in Christ; he is the way; God's ordination of us to eternal life, he is the way. The regeneration of our souls, "Your dead men shall live; with my dead body shall they arise!" Hence, the apostle, in the latter part of the 1st of Ephesians, sets before us the resurrection of Christ; in the 2nd chapter he sets before us the spiritual resurrection of the soul; "raised up to sit together with him." And that he is the way of our perseverance. As I hinted just now, we have no occasion to stop; we have no occasion to stand still, I was going to say, at least not to go back. "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life." And this way was plain to Abel, plain as A, B, C; so it was to Enoch; and so it was to all our fathers and to the prophets, and so it was to the apostles, and so it was to Christians, and so it is now. It is a plain way. And so, the apostle says, "We use great plainness of speech." We tell you at once that it is of grace; we tell you at once that Jesus Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and after the power of an endless life. It is a plain way, then, "The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." And bless the Lord for this. Under whatever feature or figure the Savior is represented, it is all plain. The Christian reads the 118th Psalm; "This gate of the Lord." Ah! he says, that is Christ; I can see that he is the gate where judgment is given in our favor, and in at which they enter. "I am the door; by me if any man enters in," as plain as A, B, C. He is the door of hope, and the door of salvation, and the door of heaven. John says, "There was a door opened in heaven, and I heard a voice talking to me, and he said, Come up hither." That is just what John wanted. He was in the isle of Patmos; he was banished; just as we sometimes are spiritually, in solitude, and all looks dark and dreary around, and all is dark and dreary within. And then a revelation of Jesus Christ, and by him a voice, "Come up hither." You are afraid to look east, or west, or north, or south; you seem to see clouds in every quarter rising; and you are afraid that cloud will burst upon you, and that that cloud will burst upon you. "Come up hither." Bless the Lord! when he calls us up, and we can go up in prayer, and contemplation, and meditation, and sometimes by realization; "or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib;" "Come up hither." We thus find he is not only the door of hope and the door of salvation, but the door of heaven. And no one can shut it, either; that is plain, too. Popery has tried at it; duty-faith keeps it about halfway open, and then, shuts it, and halfway opens it again, and then shuts it again. Duty-faith says. This is the way; no, it is not; it is your duty. And then, again; Yes, this is the way; no, it is your duty; and so, opens and shuts, and opens and shuts. But we have a better opening. We know that:

"The door of his mercy stands open, wide open, all day,
For the poor and the needy that knock by the way."

Yes: "I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." It is therefore a plain way, and the people become plain people, very plain. I myself am a plain man, very plain. I have no secrets whatever. You have all my religion, you have my experiences and life, and all my doctrines. What I appear to be, that I am. I am simply a plain man. So, if you think to have any private conversation with me, get something wonderful, then you will be wonderfully mistaken. No; what I tell you in secret, that proclaim you upon the housetop. What, are you as determined in private as you are in public? I am a hypocrite if I am not, to all intents and purposes. And so the Lord's people are to be a plain people, not filled with duplicity, but in simplicity, in honesty, in decision, to follow the

Lord; and to say plainly to one another, and as plainly to the world as they can, that they seek a better country; they have found out the way that leads to it; it is a righteous way, and a plain way; and that they see plainly that they seek a better country. They have plenty of external opportunity to return to the country whence they came out; but now God knows, for he himself has created the feeling, they desire a better country; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. So, then they are a company of plain people; they walk in a plain way. They are simply sinners saved by grace; they are simply vessels of mercy; they are simply seeking after the good of their own souls, and the good of the souls of others, and the glory of that God from whom comes all those things by which they are saved.

Third, it is also *a living way*. As the apostle says, “a new and living way.” Adam was the dying way; and the old covenant was a dying way; it died out: your own works are a dying way; “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Oh, what if Christ were to descend now in the clouds in the judgment; what ten thousand times ten thousand works, now apparently very pious, and which men give their hundreds and their thousands to forward, which they think true and living works, ah! if the dear Savior were to descend now, what millions, I am satisfied of it, would appear at his left hand instead of his right, and all their doings dead works, and not living works; for “whatsoever is not of faith,” the faith of God's elect, “is sin.” They may be as pious, and as devoted, and as earnest as possible; give their very bodies to be burned in the fulness of their zeal for their system; yet, “whatsoever is not of faith,” the faith of the operation of God, the faith of God's elect, that faith described by the apostle when he says, “It is by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed;” and whatsoever works are not of this faith are dead works, and do not belong to the living way. I do not wonder at the Pharisees being enraged of old, when the Savior made such an onslaught upon them all. They appeared righteous before men, but they had shut up the kingdom of God. They knew not the Son of God, nor the right way to God, and therefore all their works were dead works. Now, Christ being the living way means, then, he is the way for us to live. If I pray in the faith of Christ, confident in his eternal perfection, then my prayer is a living prayer. If I love him, arising from a consciousness of the eternity of his love, in the perfection of his work, then my love is a living, burning love, and not a fire of my own kindling; and if I praise him after the order of what he has done, my praises go out from my very soul, and run up the golden way, the pure and gracious way, in which God has come to me, and these are living praises. If I bear testimony of him, if I am in this living way rightly, then my testimony is a living testimony. If I can bear testimony of that conviction of sin that is sure to follow regeneration, my testimony is a living testimony, from my own living convictions. If I can bear testimony of his delivering power, his word giving me hope in his eternal mercy by Christ Jesus, then my testimony is a living testimony; there is life in it. If I realize that which the holy prophets and apostles did, some instances we have had this morning in the 103rd Psalm, then my testimony is a living testimony.